



Senate Bill No. 859

Public Act No. 15-111

**AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR
INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 10a-34 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2015*):

(a) For the purposes of this section, (1) "program of higher learning" means any course of instruction for which it is stated or implied that college or university-level credit may be given or may be received by transfer; (2) "degree" means any letters or words, diploma, certificate or other symbol or document which signifies satisfactory completion of the requirements of a program of higher learning; (3) "institution of higher education" means any person, school, board, association, limited liability company or corporation which is licensed or accredited to offer one or more programs of higher learning leading to one or more degrees; (4) "license" means the authorization by the Office of Higher Education to operate a program of higher learning or institution of higher education for a specified initial period; (5) "accreditation" means the authorization by said office to continue operating a program of higher learning or institution of higher education for subsequent periods, and in such periods to confer specified degrees; (6) "program modification" means (A) a change in a

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program of higher learning that does not clearly qualify as a new program of higher learning or a nonsubstantive change, including, but not limited to, a new program of higher learning consisting primarily of course work for a previously approved program of higher learning, (B) an approved program of higher learning to be offered at an off-campus location, (C) a change in the title of a degree, or (D) a change in the title of a program of higher learning; and (7) "nonsubstantive change" means (A) a new undergraduate certificate program, within an existing program of higher learning, of not more than thirty semester credit hours that falls under an approved program of higher learning, (B) a new baccalaureate minor of not more than eighteen semester credit hours, (C) a new undergraduate option or certificate program of not more than fifteen semester credit hours, or (D) a new graduate option or certificate program of not more than twelve semester credit hours.

(b) The Office of Higher Education shall establish regulations, in accordance with chapter 54, concerning the requirements for licensure and accreditation, such regulations to concern administration, finance, faculty, curricula, library, student admission and graduation, plant and equipment, records, catalogs, program announcements and any other criteria pertinent thereto, as well as the periods for which licensure and accreditation may be granted, and the costs and procedures of evaluations as provided in subsections (c), (d) and (i) of this section. Said office shall establish academic review commissions to hear each appeal of a denial by said office of an application by an institution of higher education for licensure or accreditation of a program of higher learning or institution of higher education. For each individual appeal, the executive director of said office, or the executive director's designee, shall select a commission that is comprised of four higher education representatives and five business and industry representatives chosen from a panel of thirty-five members, who shall be appointed as follows: (1) The Governor shall appoint five members;

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(2) the speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint five members; (3) the president pro tempore of the Senate shall appoint five members; (4) the majority leader of the House of Representatives shall appoint five members; (5) the majority leader of the Senate shall appoint five members; (6) the minority leader of the House of Representatives shall appoint five members; and (7) the minority leader of the Senate shall appoint five members. The executive director of said office, or the executive director's designee, shall ensure that each commission contains at least one member appointed by each of the appointing authorities. Each appointing authority shall select both higher education representatives and business and industry representatives, but not more than three from either category of representatives.

(c) No person, school, board, association or corporation shall confer any degree unless authorized by act of the General Assembly. No application for authority to confer any such degree shall be approved by the General Assembly or any committee thereof, nor shall any such authority be included in any charter of incorporation until such application has been evaluated and approved by the Office of Higher Education in accordance with regulations established by the Office of Higher Education.

(d) The Office of Higher Education shall review all requests and applications for program modifications, nonsubstantive changes, licensure and accreditation. The office shall review each application in consideration of the academic standards set forth in the regulations for licensure and accreditation adopted by said office in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section. Notwithstanding the provisions of section 10a-34e, any application that is determined by the office to be for (1) a program modification that meets all such academic standards, (2) a nonsubstantive change, (3) licensure, or (4) accreditation shall be deemed approved, and the office shall notify the

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institution of such approval, not later than forty-five days from the date the office receives such application without requiring any further action from the applicant.

(e) If the executive director of the Office of Higher Education, or the executive director's designee, determines that further review of an application is needed due at least in part to the applicant offering instruction in a new program of higher learning or new degree level, then the executive director or the executive director's designee shall conduct a focused or on-site review. Such applicant shall have an opportunity to state any objection regarding any individual selected to review an application on behalf of the executive director. For purposes of this subsection, "focused review" means a review by an out-of-state curriculum expert; and "on-site review" means a full team evaluation by the office at the institution of higher education.

(f) The executive director of the Office of Higher Education, or the executive director's designee, may require a focused or on-site review of any program application in a health-related field where a license in Connecticut is required to practice in such field.

(g) Any application for licensure of a new institution in this state shall be subject to an on-site review upon a determination by the Office of Higher Education that the application is complete and shall be reviewed at the institutional level for each program as described in subsection (b) of this section. Such process shall be completed not later than nine months from the date said office receives the application.

(h) If the Office of Higher Education denies an application for licensure or accreditation of a program or institution of higher education, the applicant may appeal the denial not later than ten days from the date of denial. The academic review commission shall review the appeal and make a decision on such appeal not later than thirty days from the date the applicant submits the appeal to said office.

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(i) No person, school, board, association or corporation shall operate a program of higher learning or an institution of higher education unless it has been licensed or accredited by the Office of Higher Education, nor shall it confer any degree unless it has been accredited in accordance with this section. The office shall accept regional accreditation, in satisfaction of the requirements of this subsection unless the office finds cause not to rely upon such accreditation. If any institution of higher education provides evidence of programmatic accreditation, the office may consider such accreditation in satisfaction of the requirements of this subsection and deem the program at issue in the application for accreditation to be accredited in accordance with this section. National accreditation for Connecticut institutions of higher education accredited prior to July 1, 2013, shall be accepted as being in satisfaction of the requirements of this subsection unless the office finds cause not to rely on such national accreditation.

(j) No person, school, board, association or corporation shall use in any way the term "junior college" or "college" or "university" or use any other name, title, literature, catalogs, pamphlets or descriptive matter tending to designate that it is an institution of higher education, or that it may grant academic or professional degrees, unless the institution possesses a license from, or has been accredited by, the office, nor shall it offer any program of higher learning without approval of the Office of Higher Education.

(k) Accreditation of any program or institution or authority to award degrees granted in accordance with law prior to July 1, 1965, shall continue in effect.

(l) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (b) to (j), inclusive, of this section and subject to the authority of the State Board of Education to regulate teacher education programs, new and revised academic programs proposed by an independent institution of higher education, as defined in section 10a-173, shall not be subject to

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approval by the Office of Higher Education, provided (1) the institution maintains eligibility to participate in financial aid programs governed by Title IV, Part B of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended from time to time, and (2) the institution has been located in the state and accredited as a degree-granting institution for ten years or more by a regional accrediting association recognized by the Secretary of the United States Department of Education and maintains such accreditation status. All institutions that are exempt from program approval by the Office of Higher Education under this subsection shall annually file with said office a list and brief description of any new programs introduced by the institution in the preceding academic year and any existing programs discontinued by the institution in the preceding academic year.